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Environmental concern and apparel consumption: an empirical study of Chinese consumers

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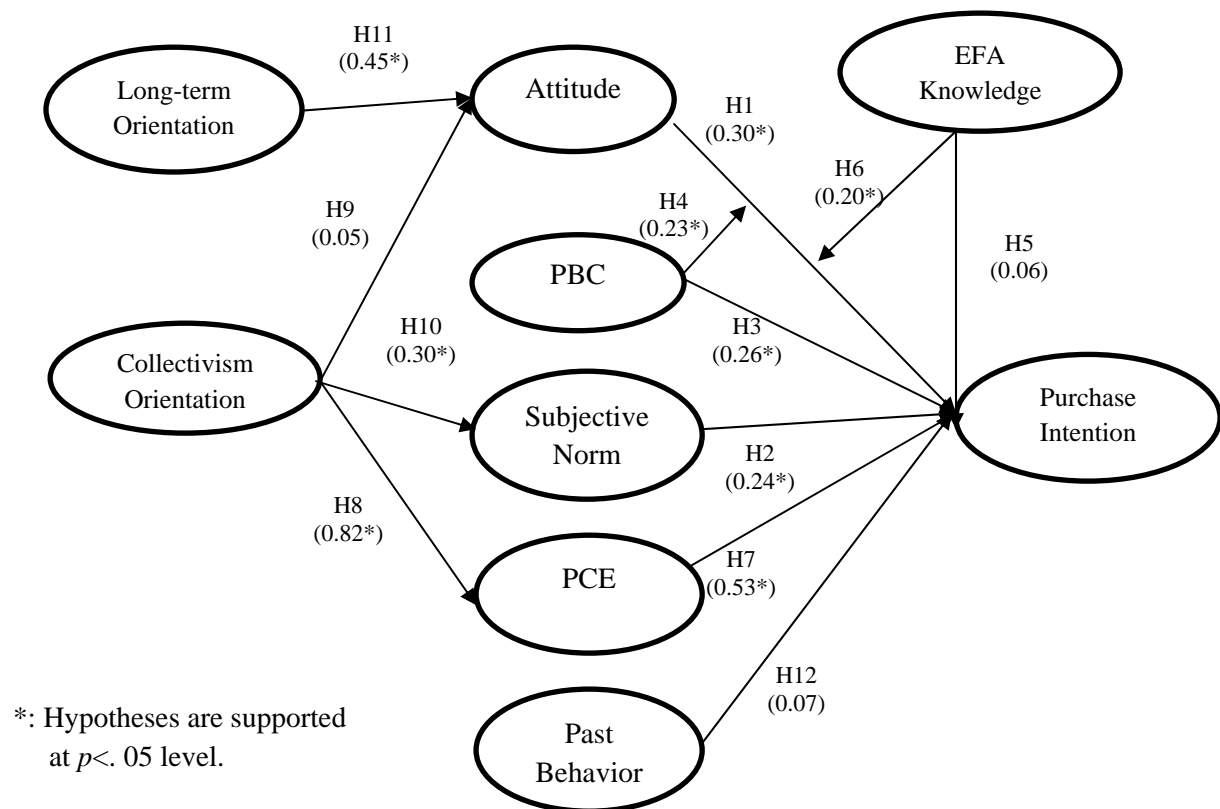
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In the past three decades, the apparel manufacturing industry has been one of driving forces for the rapid growth of China's economy. In 2010, China exported \$130 billion apparel products accounting for 37% of total global apparel exports, while apparel sales in its domestic market exceeded \$150 billion (Zheng, 2010). With the booming consumption and export, the impacts of apparel production, use and disposal on the environment have been accelerating. The level of air, water, and land pollutions has been unprecedented. According to a recent environmental awareness survey of Chinese consumers, 80 percent respondents rated environmental deterioration as the most concerned issue. Against this backdrop, a growing number of Chinese consumers are changing their apparel consumption behaviors with the belief that individual small efforts will add together to make a notable impact on the environmental protection (Lee, 2009). With Chinese consumers becoming more interested in environmentally friendly apparel (EFA) that has little to no impact on the environment during its lifecycle (Pickett-Baker and Ozaki, 2008), companies need better understanding of consumer behaviors toward this emerging phenomenon.

Compared to the knowledge gained recently in the context of developed countries (e.g., Connell, 2010), limited research has been conducted to understand the formation of consumer EFA purchase intention in China although prior studies indicated the emerging Chinese market shows a great potential. As an effort to address the gap in the literature and generate applicable information for industrial practitioners, with a focus on EFA made from recycled materials or organically grown natural fibers, this study aimed to empirically determine the significant antecedents and moderators of Chinese consumer's EFA purchase intention.

Building on the constructs (i.e. attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control (PBC)) in the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behavior (TPB), based on an extensive literature review, additional constructs (i.e. perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE), past behavior, EFA knowledge, collectivism orientation, and long-term orientation) were included to develop an enhanced consumer EFA purchase intention model. Using 192 eligible Chinese college student survey returns at a response rate of 77%, factor analysis and structural equation modeling were utilized for data analysis and hypothesis testing. Measurement model (i.e. individual latent construct) adequacy was examined through assessing model-to-data fit, unidimensionality, reliability, and construct validity, while full structural model adequacy was evaluated via hypothesis testing, model-to-data fit, and parameter estimates. Figure 1 presents the proposed model with hypotheses and testing results.

Figure 1. Consumer EFA purchase intention model



The proposed model showed sound and stable psychometric properties while the parsimonious statistical criteria were also well met. The model exhibited high explanatory power accounting for 71.6% variance in consumer EFA purchase intention. Attitude, subjective norm, PBC, and PCE showed significantly positive effects on EFA purchase intention, while PBC and EFA knowledge enhance the relationship between attitude and EFA purchase intention. In addition, consumers who cared more in-group belonging were more willing to comply with subjective norm and felt higher consumer effectiveness in environmental protection, while consumer's long-term orientation positively affected his/her attitude toward EFA purchase.

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